

"Woodlands"
Nassawadox Vicinity
Northampton County, Virginia

HABS No.
Va-590

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Washington Office, Division of Design and Construction
Washington 25, D. C.

"Woodlands"
Nassawadox Vicinity
Northampton County, Virginia

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Location: Nassawadox Vicinity (off County Road 600), Northampton County, Virginia.

Present Owner: Miss Nancy Adah J. Thomas, Apartment 5-H., 2 Peter Cooper Road, New York City 10, New York.

Present Status: Well maintained in care of tenants.

Brief Statement of Significance: This large farm house of all-frame construction is a well preserved example of cross hall type having typical Eastern Shore porches with flagstone floors on main facades. Victorian modernizations re-employing early elements like the double entrance doors, as well as gingerbread overlays, emphasize the continuity of history and shifting viewpoints in taste.

Historical Notes: The tract of land on which "Woodlands" stands was patented as early as 1647. The Michael family owned the land by 1690. In 1785 John Tompkins acquired the "Woodlands" property from John and Margaret Michaels. The late Ralph T. Whitelaw was inclined to the belief that Tompkins was the builder of the present house, about that time, for his daughter Peggy C. and her husband, William W. Wilson. The Thomas family has owned "Woodlands" since 1867. Alterations probably date around 1890.

Architectural Notes: Despite changes in doorways and disappearance of the south entrance porch, the original exterior appearance is remarkably well preserved. The building is served by inside end brick chimneys with well-defined caps. The roof is gabled and has a modillion cornice. What was probably a detached kitchen has been joined to the main block for convenience.

On the interior, the panelled room ends and wainscoting attract particular attention. The bedroom closet is worth noting and the elaborate parlor mantel is a distinguished detail. Incidentally, the dogwood flower carved in a square frame is an identical motif appearing under the eaves at nearby "Brownsville." This mantel was undoubtedly an early 19th century innovation and the introduction of the mirror a whimsical touch. The looking glass is quality plate with a beveled edge and gives one the impression of being considerably older than the feature it embellishes. To the recorder there exists the strong probability that it was a mantel glass mounted in a frame long before it was thusly installed.

In the cavernous cellar of "Woodlands" is a rare object of great antiquarian interest. It is a trough hewn out of a tree

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trunk like an Indian canoe. Miss Thomas, the present owner, has contributed a note that her grandfather used it for salting down the winter's supply of meat. Her grandmother Thomas always spoke of it as "the big old meat trough." From all indications this old meat trough reposes in its original location as photographed, the uprights apparently being intended to keep it wedged and steady.

Reference: Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore, Richmond, Virginia, Virginia Historical Society, 1951, Volume One, pp. 474-76.

Additional Notes: Since the above notes were prepared, Miss Thomas has contributed valued notes by letter under date of December 6, 1960. Her comments deserve quoting in full:

Your letter and copy of description, to accompany photographs of "Woodlands" to the Library of Congress has been received. Thank you very much for the set of photographs, with which I am very much pleased. Your man did a great job. However, the picture of the dairy (NH90) certainly shows up the little schoolhouse as being very bad off for attention. That is the dilapidated house with the dormer roof. In the pre-Civil War days it was the plantation school for home and neighboring children.

I regret the gingerbread work very much, but for some reason my aunt was determined to install it. I think because it reminded her of summer places she visited as a girl. One has a tendency to revert to scenes where youth and happiness were predominant. As you can see, the pillars beside the fireplace in NH88 were recent additions along with the grillework. The hall beams are of the same renovation, during the early part of the 1900s.

The south porch was put there by me a few years ago to replace a Victorian one which was falling into ruin, as well as being a terrific eyesore. The little fence was installed by a tenant on the lines of one which was there many, many years gone by.

The kitchen was, as you say, detached. I have heard when grandfather Thomas went there it still had the old brick floor. He put in a wood floor at a higher level (?) and enclosed the open colonnade. I think it was done very soon after the family moved to Woodlands in 1867 or 1868. You mention the dogwood flower carved in the parlor mantel and the same motif appearing at Brownsville - there was a great deal of visiting, friendship and also family connections between the Brownsville and Woodlands families.

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I have heard the meat trough was installed in Woodlands when the house was built. Whether or not this is correct I cannot say. It has been there since many, many years before the Civil War, so that might take it back to the building. It has been in that part of the cellar for years but it broke loose with such a terrific crash the inhabitants of the house rushed to the basement in fear of seeing collapsed walls.

Woodlands, in common with many old homes, seems to stay in the male line for a time and then come down to an only daughter, or pass in some way through the female line.

So far as I know, there are no interesting traditions about the place, no famous men or women have gone out from the home.

Again, thanks for the photographs. With best wishes to you for a great deal of success in collecting pictures and data about old homes throughout the country...

Prepared by: Worth Bailey, HABS National Park Service, June, 1960.

Approved:

Robert E. Smith
Chief Architect

Date 1-17-61